DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 276 395 HE 019 915

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TITLE Developmental Education: An Historical Study.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 23p.; Best copy available.
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Skills; *College Preparation; *College Students; *Developmental Studies Programs; *Educational History; Higher Education; *High Risk Students; Nontraditional Students; Skill Development; Student Development

ABSTRACT

The provision of developmental education to the academically underprepared student in colleges and universities in the United States is traced historically. U.S. colleges admitted underprepared students before the advent of open admissions and equal opportunity policies. In fact, the presence of underprepared students in American colleges has been documented since the seventeenth century. In the days of the colonial college, wealth, more than ability, decided who went to college. During the mid-eighteenth century, state universities had preparatory departments. While in the early nineteenth century church-related colleges for men served as the paradigm of U.S. higher education, at the end of the century various kinds of colleges served a wider clientele. The development of land-grant colleges led to the matriculation of nontraditional students, many of whom were underprepared. Vassar College and Cornell University are paradigms of colleges that experienced problems with the academically deficient student in the late nineteenth century. Attention is also directed to the significance of: the appearance of black colleges, junior or community colleges, remedial reading and how-to-study courses, the G.I. Bill, emphasis on individual student development as well as basic skills development, and developmental education programs in Louisiana. (SW)

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DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION: AN HISTORICAL STUDY

George H. Roberts

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DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL STUDY

The American higher education scene has been dominated with controvery since the establishment of Harvard in 1636. That controversy has revolved around many areas of academe including curriculum, governance, academic freedom, tenure, and the academically underprepared student.

Emerging state universities, small private colleges, and long established prestigious institutions of higher education have all faced the dilema of the inadequately prepared student. At the root of this dilema were and are some basic questions which need to be answered. What should be the role of the institutions of higher education in regard to the underprepared student? Should universities admit students who are not adequately prepared for college? Should colleges and universities engage in providing academic preparation for the academically underprepared student? Should institutions of higher education offer academic work considered to be on a precollegiate level?

In his 1869 inaugural address as president of Harvard, Charles Eliot responded to these questions and stated that "The American college is obliged to supplement the American school. Whatever elementary instruction the schools fail to give, the college must supply" (Eliot, 1869). Many American institutions of higher education have assumed the role of educating the underprepared student.

It is essential to establish the presence of underprepared students in American colleges since the seventeenth century. Student records as they exist today

were virtually nonexistent during the early years of American higher education. However, many other useful sources do exist from which conclusions can be drawn: institutional histories, faculty papers, student publications, alumni collections, and institutional records and archives.

These sources indicate that American institutions of higher education did admit students considered by the faculty and administration to be far below the acceptable college level (Brier, 1984a) prior to the advent of open admissions and the appearance of equal education opportunity policies on the education scene.

The first American college to be established in this country was Harvard in 1636. The college was more comparable to a secondary school than to an institution of higher education. Other institutions were established in the ensuing years. These early institutions were predominately established by the clergy for the purpose of preserving and transmitting intellectual culture. Other reasons for establishing colleges are those given by George III when he appealed to the English benefactors in 1762 in behalf of the colleges in Philadelphia and New York: "to combat the inconveniences of an uninstructed population drawn from different parts of the world...to guard against total ignorance...to instill...just principles of religion, loyalty, and a love of our excellent Constitution; to instruct in branches of useful knowledge; to train

instructors to go among the people and among the Indians" (Van Amringe, 1904). All these things a college was and all these purposes a college served.

In the days of the colonial college, most of the students came from wealthy aristocratic families. At that time wealth and social status, more than ability, decided who went to college. Some of the students had academic abilities and interests, some did not (Cross, 1971). The philosophy of the institutions of higher education was that the young people should go to college who could afford it and who needed it to maintain their station in life. The poor, the ethnic minorities, and women were not in possession of a life style which would make use of a college education.

The establishment and growth of state universities in America can be traced to the middle of the eighteenth century. These institutions were spurred into existence via the impact of the American and French Revolutions and the new ideals of the Enlightenment which resulted in demands for enlargement of the curriculum to include newer subjects along with the classics.

The established American colleges failed to respond to these needs and prompted the formation of non-sectarian state and national universities which offered equality of educational opportunity.

The goals of the newly established institutions were "to give more advanced instruction than the existing

colleges, to permit students to specialize, and to enjoy the privileges of election." These universities did not become all that they were intended to become primarily because of the low state of secondary education which was in existence. These institutions relied on the training the existing academies and colleges offered and this was not advanced enough to prepare students for the European-style university work they had planned to offer (Long, 1933).

As a result of the lack of adequate secondary preparation, most of these institutions established and maintained preparatory departments which were designed to help students develop the skills necessary for success in higher education. There were usually more students enrolled in these preparatory departments than in the regular classes (Shedd, 1932). The University of Wisconsin registered 331 students in 1865; of that number, only forty-one were enrolled in regular college classes. The remainder were assigned to the preparatory department or were classified as special students (Dunbar, 1935).

As early as 1828, the Yale Report called for an end to the admission of students with "defective preparation." The report also states that the methods of instruction employed in these institutions of higher education seemed out of place and more appropriate for secondary and/or preparatory schools.

In 1828, Andrew Jackson was elected to the presidency of the United States. Jackson symbolized and furthered

tendencies in American life that in the end spelled the defeat for the Yale Report and enhanced the proliferation of American colleges which opened their doors to growing numbers of individuals unfamiliar with the world of academe (Burke, 1982). These new institutions were established to serve local education and student needs and were locally controlled (Potts, 1977). The widely diverse student populations generally did not possess the requisite tools for learning.

Following the Civil War, there was an increased demand for an improved caliber of students in the institutions of higher education along with a demand for improvement in American higher education. In the early nineteenth century, church-related colleges for men served as the paradigm of American higher education. At the end of the nineteenth century, institutions of higher education included state colleges, scientific and technical institutes, professional and graduate schools, colleges for women and blacks and coeducational institutions (Brier, 1984a). Clark Kerr (1964) attributed these changes to the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 which led to the development of land-grant colleges. As a result of these acts, non-traditional students began to matriculate from previously untapped and unsolicited strata of American society. From the very beginning, the land-grant colleges which were established confronted problems which included meeting the learning needs of students who were seriously underprepared for higher education. It must

not be forgotten that free, tax-supported high schools in most states did not become a fact of life until the late nineteenth century. Therefore, college preparatory departments were a conventional adjunct to many midwestern and central plains colleges during the nineteenth century (Brubacher and Rudy, 1976).

The second Morrill Act in 1890 increased federal aid to land-grant and state colleges for implementing programs in applied sciences and mechanical arts. In fact, a new dimension in the concept of higher education was mandated by the Congress of the United States for "all of the children of all of the people" which differed greatly from the concept of the colonial college predecessors. These truly American institutions attempted to meet the diverse needs and interests of a pluralistic society and the abilities of the heterogeneous student populations who enrolled in them.

Vassar College and Cornell University are paradigms of institutions which experienced problems with the academically deficient student in the late nineteenth century. Vassar was established to provide collegiate education for women while Cornell was established to "provide any individual any study" (Brier, 1984b). Both institutions served the a new type of student, "the uninitiated in academic society." Each admitted academically underprepared students and each suffered controversy as a result of those admissions. The

institutions varied in their approach to the resolution of the problem.

President Raymond of Vassar commented on the educational attainment of the first Vassar students in his annual report to the board. They represented "every grade...from that of a respectable College Junior down to a point lower than there was any convenient way of indicating" (Vassar College, Annual Report, 1866). An almost complete reorganization effort was necessary to bring some similitude of order out of the chaos created by the great diversity of academic deficiencies in Vassar's first students.

The educational leaders of the day promoted the concept of elevated entrance requirements to overcome the problem. Raymond felt that it was financially more equitable to have underprepared students than no students at all. Vassar thus began to provide preparatory education for its underprepared students. These early efforts led to the establishment of the Preparatory Studies Program in 1872. In 1875-76, preparatory enrollment constituted forty-five percent of Vassar's total enrollment.

The enrollment of large numbers of academically underprepared students precipitated much controvery between faculty, alumni, students, and other supporters.

Faculty teaching preparatory students were considered to be somewhat inferior when compared to those who taught regular collegiate classes and students.

The alumni felt that "sub-freshman" education was a reproach and should be eliminated. The sub-collegiate students were viewed as an embarassment to Vassar College by the regular collegiate students. The community felt that Vassar was becoming "half college and half academy."

As a result, Vassar began to make conscious efforts to reduce the enrollment of underprepared students and to eliminate the need for preparatory education.

The culmination of this controversy was the establishment of stronger relationships with secondary schools and the development of admission agreements with secondary schools. Thus, the high school/college connection appears to have had its roots over a hundred years ago in the the preparation controversy at Vassar. Ultimately, the Preparatory Studies Program at Vassar was abolished.

Cornell University admitted its first class in 1868 and registered the largest class ever admitted to an American institution of higher education up to that time (Brier, 1984b). Cornell also rejected a number of students who failed to meet their admission requirements. However, a number of students were still admitted as special students with conditions to be met outside the standard curricular requirements. Cornell also offered students the opportunity to work and thus help to finance their education. Cornell was implemented to allow any person to find instruction in any study.

Cornell ministered to the needs of the underprepared students utilizing various techniques including subsections of college courses, special student status, adjusting degree requirements in individual cases, provision of supplementary instruction in high risk academic areas, addition of extra class sections, tutorial support, and alignment with specially developed preparatory schools. The university never instituted a preparatory school but certainly exhibited a strong influence over the growing available preparatory opportunities. Cornell's actions also led to a greater interaction between the university and secondary schools.

Following the Civil War, another type of higher education institution appeared on the academic scene. That institution was the "Negro college." These Negro colleges were established because of the stringent segregation policies in education, religion, and other social institutions in the southern states. Most of the black institutions are less than 100 years old but have provided post-secondary education to the majority of America's black population who have pursued degrees. These institutions had never been sufficiently staffed, financed, or had adequate academic resources even though they were operating under the doctrine of "separate but equal." Operating under these restrictions, black institutions have had to provide higher education for the most seriously academically disadvantaged segment of American society (McGee, 1977).

The instructional systems of black institutions have from the very first been marked by extreme diversity. In their early mission, being responsible for educating former slaves who were hampered by having no previous legal access to any formal education, these black institutions had to be frequently concerned with elementary and secondary education as well as with post-secondary studies. Most black colleges, therefore did not truly become institutions for higher education until the early twentieth century (Mayhew, 1973).

From the beginning, the curricula of black colleges focused upon the pragmatic needs of their students. Thus in the nineteenth century most of these colleges primarily offered courses in agriculture, manual and mechanical arts, homemaking, teacher preparation, and theology. Undergirding the foregoing curricula were basic skills education courses in an academy or preparatory department (Hamilton, 1977).

The philosophical practices of the historical black institutions have been called "humanistic" by some educators and "moralistic" by others. Black leaders in America who are products of black higher education institutions generally attribute their success to the continual attention given in these institutions to the nuturing of the students' personal perspectives and attitudes along with their cognitive development. A case in point is a statement given by Samuel D. Proctor (1978) in which he presents the multiple levels of intellectual and affective stimulation

and development which he experienced at Virginia Union University as a youth from the segregated schools of Norfolk, Virginia.

Brubacher and Rudy (1976) and May (1978) present the following significant milestones in the history of educational adjustments to student heterogenicity in American colleges and universities:

1. In 1852, President Henry P. Tappan of the University of Michigan in his inaugural address denounced the dilution of course content in colleges in order to meet the needs of poorly prepared students.

2. In 1869, the launching of the elective system at Harvard by President Charles W. Eliot attempted to eliminate the totally prescribed college curricula. The elective system was in essence an attempt to make the college curriculum relevant and meaningful to the diverse interests of undergraduate students. Students for the first time were allowed to choose studies for their intrinsic rather than their disciplinary value and to satisfy their personal predilections.

3. In 1874, Harvard began to offer a simplified course in freshman English at the request of the faculty who were concerned about the unsatisfactory writing skills of many new entrants.

4. In 1890, the College Entrance Examination Board was founded as an attempt to standardize admissions requirements in response to general college dissatisfaction with the inadequacies of new entrants.

5. In 1893-94, Wellesley College in Massachusetts offered the first specific developmental education courses for freshmen who were in need of increased general academic college preparation.

6. By 1915, 350 colleges in the United States reported to the U. S. commissioner of education that their institutions had college preparatory departments, academies, or high schools directly connected with them. New entrants who were academically deficient had to attend the preparatory program for one or two years.

The milestones cited above attest to the fact that American colleges have accepted responsibility for helping students overcome impeding weaknesses in academic background and skills. The academic support programs have a variety of philosophical orientations and organizational patterns. To a large extent, the program diversity appears to be a natural reflection of the differences in purpose, organization, and clientele of American higher education.

The junior college or community college also has a place in the history of developmental education. The two-year institution was born in the early 1900s and was conceived with an open door. The purpose of the junior college was to "give the disadvantaged high school graduate another chance to break the poverty cycle, and the minority student to extend his skills and realize wider career opportunities" (Boss, 1982).

Many of the courses taught in these institutions were designed "to democratize and popularize higher education and make it available to those who hitherto were barred from it." The courses were designed to meet the needs of the nontraditional student: the part-time student, the refresher-course adult, the senior citizen, the handicapped veteran, the unemployed career-changers, and the housewife entering the workforce.

These institutions have decades of experience in the provision of developmental or remedial education for the underprepared students. In 1965, over 60 percent of the

community college students ranked at or below the 30th percentile on the SCAT (Moore, 1971). By the late 1960s the most offered courses in the American community colleges were remedial reading, remedial writing, and remedial arithmetic (Roueche, 1984).

The success of these early institutions was marginal at best with as many as 90 percent of all remedial students failing or withdrawing from remedial courses (Roueche, 1968). This led to the labeling of these institutions as "revolving door" institutions. The early remedial programs were mostly "watered-down versions of college courses."

K. Patricia Cross (1976) has traced identifiable changes from the nineteenth century onward in the predominant concerns and foci in American college academic support programs. For the most part, the effort has been from isolated, narrowly conceived, poorly funded efforts to integrated, broadly conceptualized, regularly budgeted programs. Prior to the 1940s, the academic support programs were largely how-to-study courses developed in response to a rather simplistic perception of the causes of ineffective educational performance. Since many of the students in need of tools for college study came from "good families," the colleges attributed their inadequacies, not to lack of ability, but to immaturity and lack of self-discipline in organizing and utilizing college-type study habits.

Beginning in the 1940s, Cross identifies the addition of remedial reading to the how-to-study courses for

underprepared college students. This new emphasis on reading deficiencies probably resulted from the administration of standardized tests in the 1930s and 1940s. The remedial reading and how-to-study courses were customarily voluntary and non-credit and were usually conducted by counselors or other student-personnel workers. Some of these courses were offered during summer sessions prior to the freshman year.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, increased understanding developed of the true dimensions of the post-World War II college enrollment boom. Various analyses of the personal, demographic, and academic characteristics and traits of these newcomers to higher education revealed the great extent of their diversity and heterogeneity. Many WWII veterans were admitted to higher education and financed by the G. I. Bill. Many of the G. I.'s did not have verbal, quantitative, and study skills comparable to those of their fellow students. Once again, remedial and developmental courses and programs were found necessary to diminish the educational differences of students. As a result of this broadened perception of the new high-risk students, institutions of higher education began to develop programs for their underprepared enrollees which included services and studies that went beyond the formerly purely academic concerns. Undergirding these new programs was an increased sensitivity to the possible contribution of psycho- and sociocultural factors to academic success.

Cross notes that in the late 1950s and early 1960s many colleges began to differentiate between so-called "low-ability" students and so-called "underachievers" based on results of achievement test scores and other factors. As a natural outgrowth of these categorizations, institutions of higher education began to provide counseling and personal motivation activities to address student problems which were newly perceived as being related to academic achievement. The so-called "low-ability" students were generally unprovided for even in these broadened programs and rarely survived two semesters in college. The salvaging of "underachievers" was the principal concern in the academic programs throughout the 1960s.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, as "all of the children of all the people" began to enroll in college, the full dimensions of academic, personal, and cultural differences in our pluralistic student bodies were finally acknowledged and generally accepted by higher education. Factors associated with sociocultural differences in aspiration, career choices, and attitudes toward intellectual development were beginning to be diagnosed and planned for in academic support programs. The "new students" of the 1970s are defined (Cross, 1971) as those scoring in the lowest third among national samples of young people on traditional tests of academic ability as well as women and young people from various ethnic minorities. Most of the new students are caucasians whose fathers work at

blue-collar jobs. Most of the parents have never attended college and the expectation of college is new to the family. The new students themselves have not been especially successful at their high school studies. For the majority of these students, the motivation for college does not arise from anticipation of interest in learning the things they will be learning in college but from the recognition that education is the way to a better job and a better life than that of their parents.

In the 1980s, American higher education is beginning to comprehend fully the infinite complexity of academic underpreparation and performance and the variety of services which this complexity requires. It is becoming increasingly obvious that effective academic support services for today's high-risk populations must provide not only pragmatic, individualized basic skills development, but also ongoing personalized cognitive, social, and affective development. The piecemeal or bandaid approaches of former days are inadequate and can no longer be considered adequate.

The lack of basic skills necessary for collegiate success pervades Louisiana and the nation as a whole with no respect for "race, sex, ethnicity, social standing, financial status, parents' educational level, or even the student's high school grade point average (Regents Report, 1985).

With the growth in enrollment of academically underprepared students in Louisiana institutions of higher

education in the 1960s and 1970s, the Louisiana Board of Regents initiated steps to coordinate developmental education offerings in the state. Similar actions are taking place in other states. An ad hoc committee was appointed to study developmental education in Louisiana and make recommendations to the Board. The final report was submitted in 1981. The report included a model developmental education program. In September 1981, the U. S. Department of Justice and the State of Louisiana entered into a Consent Decree requiring further desegregation of the state colleges and universities. Among other things, the decree requires that Louisiana "take affirmative steps to reduce any disparity that may exist between the preparation of black and white students graduating from Louisiana's public institutions of higher education". To accomplish this, the decree requires that each institution implement a developmental education program based on the Board of Regents' model.

In 1982, the Board of Regents approved developmental education programs for each of Louisiana's public colleges and universities. The institutions have been operating under this plan since the fall of 1982. Although each institution implemented programs similar to the model, there are differences among the programs due to the level of student need and the acquisition of federal and/or supplementary state funds to finance the programs.

Theoretically, one may argue that many of the skills taught in developmental education programs at institutions of higher education should be acquired while the student is in high school or earlier. In reality, however, this has not been the case. It is impractical to expect adults to return to primary or secondary school to acquire the skills they need to be of value to themselves and to society. A choice must be made. Developmental education programs demonstrate that society has decided to help individuals overcome their skill deficiencies. The alternative would be to allow those individuals to remain a liability not only to themselves but also perhaps to society as well.

There is little doubt that developmental education has had a positive effect for many students who probably would not have been able to attain their educational goals were developmental services not available to them. Positive trends have been found by institutions that have conducted follow-up studies on the effectiveness of their developmental education programs. Such studies have shown that students who enrolled in developmental courses tended to do well once they subsequently enrolled in regular courses and compared favorably in retention with the rest of the student body. It was not unusual for students to improve more than a full grade level during one quarter of intensive study courses. Many two-year colleges reported that the percentage of students who used developmental services was greater among graduates than among the general

student body, implying that students utilizing developmental education programs are more likely to remain in college and attain an associate degree (Boswell, 1978).

However one views it, developmental education has become an important issue, especially at a time when the quality of all education is being questioned. With open admissions and increased competition for a declining number of high school graduates, a need obviously exists for this type of service.

In the future, there may be an even greater necessity for developmental education. A trend has become apparent in college enrollments whereby the percentages of traditional aged students (18-21) has decreased, while the number of students 25 and older has increased. This trend is likely to become a significant factor in the years ahead in that older students may need more assistance in acquiring and resharpening those skills needed for competent academic performance.

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